

Jane Nelson

Summer 2006

Capitol Update

Dear friends,

Let me take this opportunity to share some of the latest information circulating in our Texas State Capitol. From education to transportation to health and human services, there is much to report.

As you probably know, the Texas Legislature meets in regular session during odd-numbered years and in special session when called by the governor. The period between regular sessions is called the interim period, which is well under way as we prepare for the next regular session in January 2007.

Senate committees have received their interim charges from the lieutenant governor and are holding public hearings on a wide range of subjects. As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services, one of my primary objectives in the interim season will be to examine ways to improve access to medical care while also containing our costs.

Inside this report you will find a list of interim charges for each Senate Committee. Please take a moment to look over this information. If there is an issue of concern or interest to you, I welcome your comments or suggestions.

Additionally, the Legislature has recently concluded a special session on property tax



Senator Nelson engages in discussion on the Senate floor.

reform and school finance -- two issues of great interest to me as a former public school teacher who also owns a business. Information on the resulting legislation can be viewed on page 3 of this report.

I hope this information is helpful! It is an honor to serve you in the Texas Senate!

Very truly yours,

Senator Jane Nelson

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Interim Studies Under Way

The following is a partial list of Senate committees and issues being studied in the interim period leading up to the next regular session. To watch committee hearings, visit the Texas Senate online at www.senate.state.tx.us, click on "News and Media" and choose "Live Video." For information on hearing dates or to learn more about these issues, visit the committee web pages at the addresses listed below.

Business & Commerce

- Cable deregulation
- Consumer finance protection
- Competition among electricity providers
- Rate regulation among utility providers
- Alternative energy sources
- Used car sales by car rental companies

Web Link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c510/c510.htm>

Criminal Justice

- Resources available to offenders with mental health needs
- Trends in community supervision
- Allegations of abuse and neglect within the Texas Youth Commission
- Monitor efforts to curb methamphetamine abuse in Texas
- Kidnapping and violence along the Texas border with Mexico
- Use of funds for adult probation
- Study possible contract with Mexico for prison facility
- Examine other states' correctional health care systems for possible recommendations

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c590/c590.htm>

Education

- Review the state's accountability system
- High school performance and post-secondary readiness
- Oversight of the State Board of Education
- Use of performance pay and other incentives for teacher recruitment and retention



Senator Nelson welcomes a group of students from Senate District 12 on a recent field trip to the Texas Capitol.

centives for teacher recruitment and retention

- Classroom discipline and alternative education
- Possible impact of school choice

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c530/c530.htm>

Subcommittee on Higher Education

- Impact and cost of distance learning
- Cost of higher education and improving student access to education
- Review 10 percent law
- State's role in accountability

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c535/c535.htm>

Finance

- Business taxes and possible development of new tax structure
- Impact of state and local taxes on competitiveness of Texas businesses
- Review findings of State Auditor
- Review Medicaid, Medicare Part D, hospital reimbursement, trauma care and other health care funding
- Financial impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Texas
- Method of collecting fees from Driver's Responsibility Program
- Feasibility of lower caps on the increase in property appraisals at local level
- International wire transfers originating in Texas

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c540/c540.htm>

Subcommittee on Capital Funding for Higher Education

- Capital funding for institutions of higher education, including tuition revenue bonds

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c553/c553.htm>

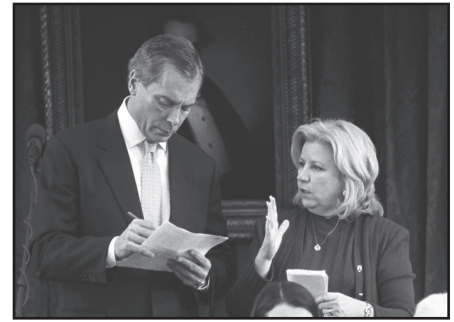
Government Organization

- Catalog historically significant locations managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife
- Review efforts to improve state resources through conservation

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c565/c565.htm>

Intergovernmental Relations

- Development in unincorporated areas
- Red light cameras
- Special taxing districts in the extrajurisdictional jurisdictions of Texas cities
- Ability of counties to access state and federal grants
- Examine the Texas Uniform Planned



Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst confers with Senator Nelson in the Senate chamber.

Community Act

- Texas wine industry
- Floodplain management
- Low Income Housing Tax Credits

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c520/c520.htm>

International Relations & Trade

- Competitiveness of Texas entities in international markets
- Infrastructure and economic development needs of the colonias
- Housing conditions in border colonias and rural areas
- State and local policies relating to water, wastewater, transportation and health infrastructure in border colonias

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c545/c545.htm>

Jurisprudence

- Court oversight of fiduciaries
- Use of electronic court records
- Collection of court fees
- Collaborative law procedures
- Policies relating to child support collection

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c550/c550.htm>



Senator Nelson and Congressman Michael Burgess participated in a recent luncheon to honor cancer survivors in Denton.

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Senator Nelson Re-Named Chair of Health & Human Services; Also to Serve on Finance, Nominations, Government Organization

Senator Jane Nelson was re-appointed Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services. She was also re-appointed to the powerful Senate Finance Committee, as well as the Committees on Government Organization and Nominations and the Texas Legislative Council.

"I am eager to continue our efforts on the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services to improve access to health care in Texas and to examine ways to contain health care costs for patients, employers and taxpayers," Senator Nelson said. "I am also honored to be re-appointed to the Finance, Government Organization and Nominations Committees. We have several important challenges ahead, and I look forward to resuming our efforts to prepare for the next legislative session."

Following are the interim assignments for the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services:

- Study and make recommendations for improving delivery of Texas' mental health services;
- Monitor state and federal Medicaid reform proposals, including their impact on the Medicaid program in Texas, as well as cost-containment measures;
- Study and make recommendations relating to filling shortages in the health care workforce and improving medical educational services;
- Examine strategies relating to Federally Qualified Health Centers and make recommendations;
- Study and make recommendations relating to the use of emerging skin cell research;
- Study and make recommendations for improving vaccination rates and ensuring an adequate vaccination supply in the state;
- Evaluate and make recommendations relating to the creation of a comprehensive and statewide nutrition and physical activity plan to address obesity and chronic diseases;
- Monitor the implementation of S.B. 6 by Senator Nelson, relating to Child and Adult Protective Services;
- Study the current use of the 2-1-1



Senator Nelson leads a press conference to raise awareness about family violence.

network to provide access to information on federal, state, and local resources;

- Monitor the implementation of H.B. 2292, 78th Legislature, Regular Session, relating to health and human services.

Property Tax Reform & School Finance at-a-glance

The Texas Legislature ended its special session on tax reform and school finance with something that has eluded lawmakers in previous attempts -- a solution. The Legislature approved a major overhaul of the funding system that supports public education in keeping with a ruling by the Texas Supreme Court, which had declared the previous system unconstitutional.

The reform plan generally follows the recommendations of Governor Rick Perry's Texas Tax Reform Commission, which held hearings around Texas in the weeks leading up to the special session and solicited unprecedented input and support from the business community.

"As a business owner and a former public school teacher, it was important to me that we improve education in a manner that makes the best possible use of every dollar spent on education," Senator Nelson said. "Property owners in Texas are literally being taxed out of their homes and businesses, which is why the most common comment to my office was to reduce property taxes. The reform plan approved in this special session provides the largest

tax cut in state history while at the same time reforming education."

The following are some of the highlights of the reforms approved by the Legislature:

- Property tax rates are reduced by 11 percent in the current year; 33 percent in year two.
- For the average home worth \$150,000, homeowners save approximately \$750 annually.
- Teachers receive a \$2,000 pay raise;
- A merit pay initiative established to allow extra income based on student achievement;
- The health care stipend for public school support employees will remain at \$500 for full-time individuals.
- Curriculum changes to make Texas students more competitive internationally by requiring 4 years of math and science to earn a high school diploma.

For more information on the reforms passed this session, visit the Texas Tax Reform Commission online at www.ttrc.state.tx.us

Natural Resources

- Air quality
- Water supply, including conservation, interbasin transfers, and regional and state water development plans
- Use of liquefied natural gas, compressed natural gas and propane
- Regulations for landfills and sewer plants
- Development of bio-diesel, bio-fuels, ethanol, and other renewable products in Texas
- Mineral and surface rights

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c580/c580.htm>

State Affairs

- Employees Retirement System of Texas and the Teachers Retirement System of Texas
- Verification of voter identification
- Regulation of health care plans
- Eminent domain
- Health care mandates
- Lobby practices among recipients of state funding
- Employment law
- Privatization of child welfare services

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c570/c570.htm>

Transportation & Homeland Security

- Fees associated with overweight trucks
- Monitor impact the federal Patriot Act has on homeland security in Texas
- Relocation of rail facilities

- Naming of state highways
- Illegal border crossings and criminal activity along Texas border with Mexico

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c640/c640.htm>

Veteran Affairs & Military Installations

- Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act
- Inventory state benefits available to veterans

Web link: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c650/c650.htm>



Senator Nelson receives the Founder's Award from the late Phil Strickland at a recent Texans Care for Children luncheon. Senator Nelson was honored for her efforts to reform the state's protective services to provide better safeguards for abused and neglected children.

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HELPFUL CONTACT INFO

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(800) 843-5789 • www.governor.state.tx.us

Legislature

www.capitol.state.tx.us

Senate Web Site for Kids

www.senate.state.tx.us/kids/

Texas Supreme Court

www.courts.state.tx.us

Voting and Election Information

(800) 252-8683 • www.sos.state.tx.us

Texas Tomorrow Fund & Comptroller

(800) 445-GRAD • www.window.state.tx.us

Attorney General

(800) 252-8011 • www.oag.state.tx.us

Department of Public Safety Roadside Emergency

(800) 525-5555 • www.txdps.state.tx.us

Texas Workforce Commission

(800) 832-9243 • www.twc.state.tx.us

Department of State Health Services

(512) 458-7111 • www.dshs.state.tx.us

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

(512) 239-1000 • www.tceq.state.tx.us

Texas Department of Aging & Disability Services

(512) 424-6840 • www.dads.state.tx.us

Automated Child Support Information Line

(Office of the Attorney General)
(800) 252-8014

